

After lawsuit revealed they took bets on spread of coronavirus in Iowa plant

Whitewash investigation ends with Tyson Foods firing seven managers

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Tyson Foods announced on Wednesday that it had fired seven of its managers at its Waterloo, Iowa, pork plant who were revealed in a lawsuit to have taken bets on the number of workers who would become infected with coronavirus. The action was the outcome of an “independent” investigation headed by former US attorney general and current corporate attorney Eric Holder, an investigation which has now concluded.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* predicted, the investigation by Holder, who made his bones as a Wall Street attorney before joining the Obama administration, is a complete whitewash, using the demented actions of the local plant supervisors to scapegoat them and shield Tyson’s top leadership from responsibility. Underscoring this fact, neither Holder nor Tyson Foods even released a public report, standard practice in similar corporate “investigations.”

The revelations that plant manager Tom Hart ran a coronavirus betting pool with other supervisors was only the most explosive of a long list of allegations in the suit, which also named then-CEO Noel White and Chairman John H Tyson as defendants in the civil suit. The suit was filed by the son of a plant worker who died after contracting COVID.

According to the lawsuit, Tyson Foods lied to the public, falsely claiming that there were no cases in the facility even as supervisors stopped walking the floor out of fear for their own safety. To make matters worse, Tyson itself may have been responsible for introducing the virus into the workforce after it transferred workers from Georgia plants which were closed due to COVID outbreaks to the Waterloo plant without any testing or

quarantining.

By April, Black Hawk County health officials had traced 86 of the county’s 189 cases to the plant, and pleaded with Tyson to close the facility in the interest of public safety. The company not only refused, but CEO Noel White personally intervened to secure an executive order from Republican Governor Kim Reynolds to prohibit local governments from shutting down businesses on their own initiative. Not only did Tyson resist calls to close the plant, management introduced \$500 “thank you bonuses” for perfect attendance in an effort to keep the plant operating at normal capacity.

On April 22, Tyson finally suspended operations at the plant, only to reopen two weeks later on May 7. By then, however, the damage had already been done, and over 1,000 cases and five deaths have thus far occurred at the plant. Nationwide, at least 11,000 Tyson workers have been infected and 36 have died, more than any other food processing company. Black Hawk County has seen 12,098 cases and 200 deaths, and in Tyson’s plant in Perry, Iowa, more than half of the workforce were infected.

However, there is no indication than any of these other, somewhat less headline-grabbing allegations involving the company’s top management was even considered by the investigation. A spokesman who spoke with National Public Radio said, “Mr. Holder and his team looked specifically at the gaming allegations and found sufficient evidence for us to terminate those involved.” The spokesman also refused to confirm whether the company had in fact offered

“thank-you bonuses” to employees.

While it has fired the seven managers, Tyson continues to “gamble” with the lives of tens of thousands of workers, keeping the plant open in order to prop up share values and pay out increased dividends for its investors.

A real “independent” investigation would have found criminally responsible Tyson’s corporate leadership, the Iowa state government, the Trump administration, which in April issued an executive order under the Defense Production Act to keep meatpacking plants open, and top Democrats and media figures who also have opposed any lockdown measures to halt the spread of the virus. The deaths were the result of the deliberate policy of herd immunity, which also has the support of congressional Democrats and the incoming Biden administration, to allow workers to become infected on the job in order to keep pumping out record profits.

This week, another lawsuit was filed against Tyson management by the relatives of a deceased Iowa Tyson worker, this time in Buena Vista County’s Storm Lake plant, located only 160 miles from Waterloo. The family of 65-year-old Steven Everhard allege that Everhard was knowingly exposed when he contracted the virus in late May. Everhard died the following month on June 18. The family of the deceased is asking for a jury trial and financial damages in excess of \$10,000.



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